



By the readers of ArrowTrade

# Finding and keeping good employees

Last issue when ArrowTrade asked dealers about running successful buck and doe contests, we were overwhelmed with responses. But this month's topic proved much harder for retailers to get a handle on, with just half as many responding. Michael Inzone of Warren's Archery & Fishing probably expressed the thoughts of many when the Loram, New York retailer wrote "Finding good employees? Good luck. Please tell ME."

Carl Burns, a New Creek, West Virginia retailer lamented, "It's hard to find good employees. And if you do, and show them the ropes, they go out on their own so you lose again." Burns said he knows the right employees will be customer-friendly and honest, but like Inzone he ended with a plea. "If you have any answers to help me find good employees, please share them."

Here's one possible approach, courtesy of Michael Bollinger, Full Draw Archery, Saltsburg, Pennsylvania. "First you find a person who is loyal to your pro shop and your main bow line. Then you ask them to start helping one day a week during the slow season. This way you find out how he or she can interact with people. If they are really good, you can bring them in during the busy season, full time."

Several retailers told us they look first to their customer base and their circle of acquaintances when they have a position to fill. "My best employees have been long-time customers that I have gotten to know over the years and who have shown a love and understanding of archery. I normally have to teach sales techniques and customer relations," said Ed Atwood, who manages King Cole Archery in Pennsylvania.

"I have found the best employees come from within my customer base," David DeBadts wrote from Tim's Arrow Shop in Wolcott, New York. "People who

have shown a real interest in and dedication to the business can make excellent employees. If you work side by side with them for a short time, it soon will become obvious if that person has what it takes to work with customers and provide the services you expect."

"We have found our best employees through our family and through our customer base," wrote Bob Bernhardt of Shooter's Place, New Brighton, Pennsylvania. "Our family employees obviously have the future of the business at heart. Our two non-family employees were former customers who were knowledgeable, personable, well-known and

honest. We encourage them to stay with us by paying the best wages we can, by giving employee discounts and by providing all the training possible."

"I generally look for a person I've known for a couple years and that knows their way around a bow set-up," Mike Benton said from Bay Country Archery of Pasadena, Maryland. Benton said he watches for someone that is helpful to his friends, has a good personality and is trustworthy.

Angela Atkins, co-owner of Triple A Archery in Stokesdale, North Carolina, suggested looking among avid hunters who have the right enthusiasm for the



All dealers who were quoted in this article received a free T-shirt, courtesy of Buck Wear. We'll send your choice of the styles above to any retailers whose comments are chosen for the November or January columns. Look over the topics below, then fill out the Dealer-To-Dealer Card after the next page. You can also send your comments in letter form to ArrowTrade, 3479 409th Ave. NW, Braham, MN 55006 or by email to [atrade@ecenet.com](mailto:atrade@ecenet.com).

**Encouraging year-round shooting.** Tells us ways you encourage customers to shoot year-round. If you've got indoor or outdoor ranges, what improvements have you made to them in the past few years and how do you keep people using them? Have you considered adding a video range or pop-up 3-D range? *November issue-Responses Due Sept. 10*

**Competing & cooperating with other retailers.** Every retailer faces some level of competition. Tell us some ways you successfully compete with other retail outlets for bowhunting gear in your trade area. If you've figured out good ways to cooperate with the competition, we want to hear about that too. *January issue-Responses Due Nov. 10*

sport. Bill Bradsher owns F.T.C. in Reidsville, North Carolina and agreed the new employee should be an avid hunter, but also one who enjoys helping the public no matter what skill level the customer has.

At Black Bear Archery in St. Georges, Delaware, Robert Wilkins looks at his pool of customers for the man or woman with good technical skills and the friendliness to share that with others. If they're hired, he'll teach them arrow building and minor bow work at first, then gradually train them in all the products and services offered by the business.

"The best employees are usually found within the people who shop there," Jaime Greiss agrees from Chris Bait & Tackle, Mertztown, Pennsylvania. He looks for ones that "are not afraid to take advice we give them, and use it wisely."

From New Haven, Kentucky, Gene Culver said his Bent Arrow Archery only needs extra help for about one month out of the year. Since it's going to be a temporary job, he looks for young people who are excited about the sport they've taken up and who want to learn more about archery.

Students from the local state college who are interested in bowhunting or 3-D have worked out well as employees for David Whetzel of The Bait & Tackle, Fairmont, West Virginia. On the other hand, Endless Mountain Archery of Montrose, Pennsylvania keys in on mothers of school-aged children. "They are very reliable and appreciate the opportunity for part-time, flexible hours."

"The best place I've found employees is at 3-D & other competitive shoots," noted Bill Weldon of Around The Tree Archery, Croydon, Pennsylvania. "Most people involved in the sport of archery on a competitive basis would also enjoy sharing their knowledge and making money would be a bonus. The person I look for is the person who isn't afraid to help others on the course or during the shoot," Weldon said. "Training is simple: There is nothing better than hands-on."

Tom Majjewski of Thomas Custom, Fredricksburg, Maryland also looks for avid archers. "The best employees I've found are enthusiasts, not necessarily customers, but people that have a genuine interest in the sport and the technology that goes with it. Customers who

ask questions, but who have also done their homework on the subjects they're asking about, have the most potential." Once he has a new person on board, Majewski said, "The best way I have to make sure my salesmen are successful is to ensure that they know our products inside and out. A knowledgeable salesman 99 percent of the time has a better shot at closing the deal than one who stumbles because of inadequate product knowledge."

It's not just avid hunters, but avid ethical hunters that Larry Byers looks for when he had a slot to fill at Sports Unlimited in Franklin, West Virginia. "I make sure they are ethical hunters who obey all game laws and practice good sportsmanship. I make sure they understand the privilege of hunting and are good conservationists." As he is going through an interview, Byers said he wants the candidate "to understand we are in business to serve the customers' needs all the time. No one should leave the store without feeling important or without feeling they had their questions answered."

"I mandate a professional look," Todd Campbell of Todd's Pro Shop, Conover, Ohio told ArrowTrade about the employees he hires. "No hooligan dress or whacked-out hair. I give raises the first year on a schedule: after one year they're earning \$1 more than starting and from then on they are given raises based on performance. My employees are part of my business family and are treated as such."

Jonathan Barrett of MC Archery, Lebanon, Pennsylvania uses paid show attendance and time off to help retain the best employees. He reminds readers after screening for archery knowledge, to ask obvious questions like what hours people can work and why they left a previous job before signing them on.

Mary Sirnic of R&M Sport Shop, Jeannette, Pennsylvania said product knowledge is a plus, but intelligent people can be trained in that. "We like our applicants to be courteous, to have a good appearance, and to remember the customer is always right. If they are selling for us, I tell them to sell themselves first, because then selling the product will be much easier."

We'll wrap up with comments from the owner of Left Wing Archery,

Middlefield, New York. Sam Johnson said if you spot a high-level, energetic, community-minded individual who likes to hunt you should approach them about helping out in the store, even if it's only part-time during peak season. "I have found the best employees come right from the heart of the community. Someone who is always at the high school basketball game, who attends church, who is involved with Boy Scouts and maybe is a member of the local fire department... you need this high profile person in your shop because they know everybody and are well-liked. These individuals already possess people skills and only need to be taught the technical part (and that's the easy part.) It won't be long before everybody knows they are part of your team. This new employee will have knowledge of your customer base as soon as they show up to work at your shop. Use that to your advantage, and you will see an increase in sales."

"If you have a good employee, encourage them with a competitive wage, store discounts and by taking them along to trade shows," Johnson said. If there's a technical class coming up, consider sending the employee and letting them take family members along so it can serve as a mini-vacation.

**Editor's Note:** John Kasun has more advice on finding and retaining employees, in the Business Break article that begins on page 62



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